

TELEPHONE OPERATORS HAVE MOST CO-OPERATIVE OF ALL JOBS AN INTERESTING DAY IN THE LIFE AT THE "MAIN" EXCHANGE

"I BEG YOUR PARDON" ONLY COMEBACK THAT "HELLO GIRL" MAKES

Silence Like Pall Hangs Over Big Rooms Where Efficient, Business-Like Young Women Make 150 Connections per Minute—Nowhere Else In the World Will be Found so Many Girls Who Chatter so Little—Though General Public Thinks That "Gossiping Flappers" Are to Blame for Delays in Securing Calls.

SUPPOSE that Mr. Pillar, of a prominent church, is on the telephone wire at the busy hour of the day. Mr. Pillar has been trying for one minute and thirty seconds to get in touch with the golf professional at his club, to arrange for a practice round on Sunday afternoon before he plays his regular foursome for \$1 per hole.

Then use your powers of imagination and suppose again that the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company, being short-handed with their help, has that morning hired as a switch-board operator an ex-second mate off a coast-wise schooner. The conversation follows:

Mr. Pillar: "Confound you, central, you haven't brains enough to get out of a shower of rain. I have been waiting here at this phone twenty minutes for you to connect me. If I didn't have any more sense than you have, I'd dive off Chain Bridge and do the world a good turn."

The Ex-Second Mate: "I beg your pardon."

Do you suppose the hard-worked second mate, a hundred tiny lights dancing in front of eyes, and a buzzer dinning in his ears, would reply as quoted above?

He would not, not by about twenty fathoms of two-inch manila rope, he would not.

But that's the stock phrase of the girls who work the most thankless jobs in the world.

Here in Washington every day there are thousands of people who use the phone at busy hours, get a little ruffled over a two-minute wait, and let go everything that their nasty dispositions have been storing up to say to some one who hasn't a comeback. The telephone operator is forbidden by the rules of the company to answer those unthinking "patrons" who burn up the wire with senseless fury. To the worst sort of nagging, she has their stock phrase:

"I beg your pardon."

It is hard to convince the public that the young girl who plugs away at connections all day long is not the gum-chewing, irresponsible flapper pictured by the comic artists in the weeklies. Tell them that she is a hard-working, hustling young woman with brains to spare? Nothing to it. On whom are they going to take out their anger, when things go wrong, if not on the voice at the switchboard?

THEY ARE ALL THE SAME.

From the junior clerk drawing down his \$12 each week, to the head magnate at Hog Island, few have had the slightest restraint about handing the little women at the other end of the telephone wire all the bad humor they had stewing around in them for a week. The Chesapeake, who takes off his hat when the charwoman enters the elevator, does not hesitate to abuse the telephone girl when she takes seven seconds to make a connection for him. Charley, the soda water clerk, threatens her with instant discharge when she tells him that Cora's line is busy, and where can you find a telephone user who does not believe that central is "listening in" on his most private conversations.

There are 1,200 telephone operators working in the Washington exchanges and all of them are brainy, hard-working young women.

When it is taken into consideration that a telephone operator handles as high as 150 calls a minute and makes the same number of connections during every moment of her eight working hours, it can readily be understood that she has not much leisure to pass in social gossip. The board claims her attention all ways, and was he to the young woman who tries to steal a bit of conversation with her next-door neighbor.

In an instant that portion of the board in front of her is a tiny world of dancing, yelling, protesting lights, and a moment later a watchful supervisor has her on the carpet.

If you want to get a real line on the telephone operator, drift up to the telephone office and get genial C. T. Claggett to conduct you through the Franklin or Main exchange. You will find either place a scene of quiet energy and swift efficiency that will cause you to marvel. Just think of it, an office employing 150 young women and never a word of gossip passing between them during the entire day. Where else in Washington can you find such a state of affairs?

The wages are very good and the management has surrounded the girls with every possible comfort and convenience.

When the young woman applies for work as a telephone operator she is sent to the telephone school for five weeks. Here she attends illustrated lectures and receives instructions from women who have been "through the mill" and know everything there is to know about a telephone. When she soaks in all the information she can receive from this source, she is assigned a station at a dummy switchboard. Experienced operators, sitting in the same room with her, ask for dummy connections and carefully note the girl's aptitude in making the connection. This is the final test, and everything the pupil does is watched carefully. Her voice, the rapidity with which she makes the connection, her demeanor under a quick-fire of calls, are all taken into consideration and the results reported to the appointing officers. While attending school the girl receives a salary of \$17.50 per week.

She receives increases from time to time. Her work as an operator is watched by those who are anxious to develop her ability, and if she makes good she is made a chief operator or a supervisor.

The main exchange handles the calls from the business section of the city and it naturally calls for

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A TELEPHONE GIRL



TOP ROW—Left: The operator is shown making one of the lightning-like gestures necessary to connect two parties. In the oval is shown a group of beginners attending a lecture on art of plugging a switchboard. Right—A rest room in the main exchange.

The girl in the center has the right attitude for the public to adopt, and the right frame of mind when calling central.

the services of the most capable telephone girls on the local force. Under the direction of Miss Small, 135 young women are engaged in what seems to be an endless repetition of plugging a puzzling maze of cords in to a countless world of holes and pulling them out again. Except for the sounds made by the clicks of the connections, and a low buzz of activity, the big room is silent. A supervisor is

assigned to each eight operators. Her duties consist of walking close behind their chairs, watching their work carefully and now and then stepping forward to assist some girl who possibly becomes rattled under an extra rush of calls. The eyes of the supervisor cover everything and

the slightest hesitation or confusion on the part of any operator is her signal to get on the job and straighten out matters.

These supervisors are very capable young women. They have all been telephone operators in their time and they have sympathy and

understanding for the mistakes of the beginner. They exercise patience and kindness in dealing with her. She is shown how the same mistake can be avoided in the future and is made to feel that her work on the whole is of a very satisfactory nature. When the new

In the circle at the right is a class in telephony listening to an expert outline the work that modern business life of the city is founded upon.

In the circle left the supervisor, that first sergeant of the telephone company, watches her section of operators with all-seeing eyes. Who said these girls waste time in idle chatter?

Below: The lunch room that is maintained by the company.

NOVICES IN GAME MUST PASS TEST

Lunch and Rest Rooms
Make Her Task at
Switchboards Most
Pleasant.

reach her, she is promptly dismissed and her place filled with some one else.

The information department is a little hustling world to itself. Here about twenty young women surrounded by big volumes containing information pertaining to their duties, are hustling about with an activity that makes a honey bee look like a loafer. These are the young women who are on the job when you fretfully call up to find out what is the number of so and so at such and such a number. These are the girls you could be because they won't give you Senator —'s private number that is not in the book.

Once upon a time you used to worry these young women by asking what time it was, where the fire was, what was the baseball score and what was the best way to make chicken pie. It was too much for her; and when the management saw members of its information force becoming gray-haired around the age of eighteen and nineteen years, they became alarmed and decided that the fond mother who wanted to know what was good for baby's colic must get her information from other sources. Now "Information" will only answer on the subject connected with her job.

Calls between different Government departments are handled by two young women on a board which is devoted to that purpose and nothing else. The girls, in charge of this board, are the pick of the company's force and they have to be. The number of calls going back and forth between the different departments run up in the thousands each day, and the operators making the connections must be very rapid and very efficient.

PAY ROLLS ARE ENORMOUS.

What a mighty part the telephone girl plays in the affairs of the telephone company can be realized when it is understood that one-third of the vast amount spent by it each year goes for the operator's salary and expenses in making her proficient in that line of work. No money is spared and nothing is overlooked in developing the green girl into a good worker. The work is made as agreeable as it possibly can be under the circumstances.

Comfortable rest rooms are provided. The medical department, presided over by skilled physicians, looks after her health and watches to see how she stands up under the work. At her first complaint the medical workers are called for. The girl is examined, and if the ailment is found to be not of a serious nature she is attended to by those in charge. A record is kept of her cases and she receives excellent care and attention until the last vestige of her illness has disappeared.

If her illness is serious she is sent home and receives her weekly salary during the course of her illness, just the same as if she was working on the board. This is made possible by a sort of benefit club arrangement that exists among the telephone operators.

OWN THEIR LUNCH ROOMS.

The company has also established lunch rooms, where the girls may buy their meals at cost price to the company. During the war the telephone company either bought or leased several large buildings in Washington and converted them into modern hotels.

These were used to house and feed the large number of girls who came to Washington from all parts of the country, to take positions with the telephone company. One or two of them are still being maintained, but gradually the affairs of the telephone company are getting back to a normal state and its management is doing away with the hotel end of its affairs.

Washington is the center of the United States, and in this city, perhaps more than any other, the telephone company is endeavoring to give its subscribers perfect service. It accepts as pupils only the highest type of girls and, once accepted, it adopts every method to turn them into proficient telephone operators.

Each girl starting in on the job has the knowledge and is made to feel that a powerful corporation is taking a personal interest in her success and doing everything in its power to assist and help her along the road to industrial independence.

TEN HUSBANDS TO EACH WIFE IN HIDDEN TIBET

Here is an account of life in a remote part of Tibet, where women propose to men and have as many as ten husbands by marrying a whole family of brothers at the same time. The article was written for the London Daily Mail by F. W. Thomas, Chief Librarian at the India Office and Reader in Tibetan in London University, who spent his holidays this year in the mysterious land beyond the Himalayas, whence he has just returned.

By F. W. THOMAS.

I STARTED from Kalimpong, east of Darjeeling, on a fourteen-day's journey through strange and wonderful country to Gyantse, six days' travel from Lhasa," he said.

All the way to Gyantse there are sleeping bungalows made by the British government for the benefit of trade agents. At Gyantse

there is a British trade agent, who lives in a fort protected by fifty Indian sepoy and a lieutenant of the Indian army. There is also a British postoffice, and an Indian doctor.

I went into the Tibetan monasteries on the way and spent long hours pouring over age-old manuscripts and books with the priests and lamas. Their literature represents the mediaeval thought of India and is full of abstruse metaphysics. The lamas and priests wear high boots of cloth which lace up at the back, long trousers, and a long coat woven of yak hair.

WEDDINGS IN TIBET. The monks make their own guns for their army, which they form themselves. They also make their own swords, which have two edges, but rifles are imported.

The women I met were robust and unvelled and wear skirts and bodices, and tie their somewhat plentiful hair in a framework above their heads. They marry a whole family of brothers at the same time.

If there are ten brothers in the

family into which she decides to marry, the woman marries them all. I suppose it is because there are fewer women in Tibet than men. The courting is done in the ordinary go-between system of the

"THE DEW OF DEATH" DEADLIEST WAR GAS

It is an interesting fact that the deadliest chemical for use in military operations was discovered by the allies, though it was not ready for employment in the field when the armistice was signed. Of this substance details are given for the first time in a popular work by General Amos De Fries and Major C. J. West, both of the United States army, in their admirable book, "Chemical Warfare," published by McGraw-Hill, London, England, which contains an exhaustive account of the whole history of gas warfare.

The chemical in question was called Lewisite, after Captain Lewis,

east, but the Tibetan woman has a great deal to say in her choice of the family into which she will marry.

A wedding ceremony in Tibet is a complicated and curious affair.

Early in the morning of the wedding day the father and mother give a farewell banquet in the house of the bride. After the banquet the priest preaches to the bride, standing before her. Here and there in his sermon he inserts a story which deeply impresses the bride. When it is all over she leaves her father's house on horseback, that is, of course among the higher circles, and proceeds to the house of the bridegroom, where an imitation sword is thrown at her to intimidate evil spirits.

Further ceremonies take place and sour milk is brought out. After drinking it the bride is admitted. She marries the brother or brothers at the same time or at intervals, but sometimes the bride and her brother-in-law live together at their pleasure without having any formal ceremony to celebrate their wedding. In the best families care is taken to see that all the brothers are not at home at the same time. If one brother is at home the other absent himself.

The women have fine natural

voices, and at Gyantse a Tibetan opera was performed in my honor. It lasted five or six hours. Famous actors and actresses from Lhasa with a distinct type of beauty acted mythological scenes of the birth of Buddha in a previous life, in which he displayed wonderful liberality, giving away all his wealth to beggars.

COSTUMES ARE WEIRD.

The men and women players sang all through the play, and the music of trumpets and drums was not disagreeable by any means. The costumes were weird, gorgeous and wonderful. In the middle of the play pots of Tibetan barley beer were handed around. The men had good voices as well as the women, I believe it is due to the climate.

On my way back I stopped at a little school for boys and girls in charge of Mrs. McDonald. I asked her to make her little Tibetan pupils sing, and after a minute or so I realized that they were singing the song we used to sing in our own schools, "This is the way we wash our hands in Tibetan."